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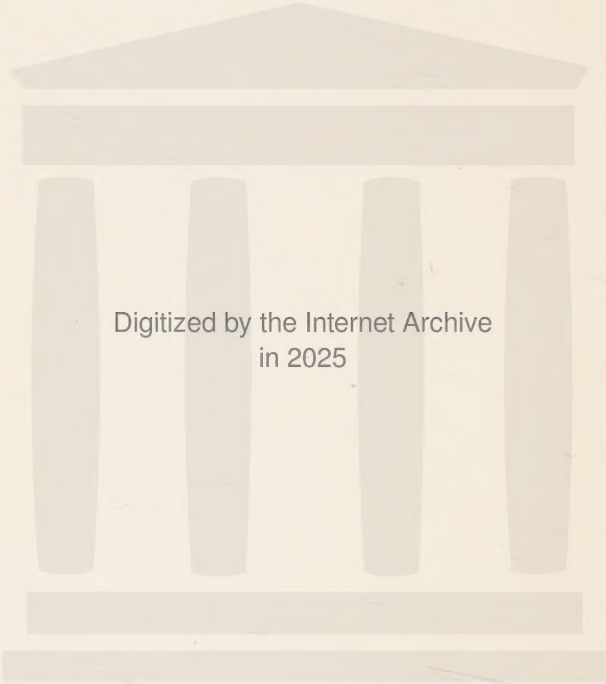
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DOWN THROUGH THE AGES

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DOWN THROUGH THE AGES

THE STORY OF

The King James Bible

BY

FRANK E. GAEBELEIN, A.M.

Principal of The Stony Brook School

Bible
Versions of Bibl
Title

New York

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TO MY PARENTS
THIS BOOK WITH ALL RESPECT
AND LOVE IS DEDICATED.

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FOREWORD

Many persons who claim the most honorable of names, Christian, are unacquainted with the history of the sole authority upon which their faith is built. In a sense they know the Bible. But they are ignorant of the glorious record of its life down through the ages, and they fail to appreciate its superb beauty of expression.

It is the hope of the author that, through the reading of this book, some may be stimulated to further study of the Word of God; that they may realize how unique is its historical background; that they may comprehend its literary supremacy; and that, through these things, they may reach a stepping stone to an understanding of its spiritual content. Intended chiefly as a rapid survey, these pages aim to present as concisely as possible a large number of facts gathered from sources not generally accessible to the average reader of the Bible.

To the Rev. Ford C. Ottman, D.D., the author wishes to express appreciation for helpful criticism of manuscript and proof.

Stony Brook, N. Y.,
March, 1924.

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DOWN THROUGH THE AGES

I

BEGINNINGS

The Bible is a book of single yet composite authorship. This is the fact that marks it as unique and sets it apart from all other books in the world. Between it and other writings there is fixed a great gulf, impassable and never to be bridged by the production of another book comparable to it. The Bible is God expressing Himself through humanity. Men wrote it, but they wrote it only under the guidance of the Almighty. His was the ruling hand; His was the mind that originated the grand conception; His was the Spirit that, entering into humble men, caused them to record words that will never die.

Humanly speaking, then, the Bible is of composite authorship. About forty men took part in writing it. Few of these men in the

modern sense of the word were scholars. They came from all stations in life. Some, like Moses, David, and Solomon, were leaders and kings; others, like Peter, were humble laborers. They wrote over a wide period of years. Moses began the Pentateuch about 1500 B.C.;[1] St. John wrote the Revelation about A.D. 97. These writers were not merely literary men. They did not devote their lives to writing as did Cervantes or Goethe or others noted in the history of books. They were men of action—generals, princes, and kings; priests, prophets, and religious leaders; stout-hearted apostles and missionaries, fighting to make known to pagan Rome the revelation of God. Daniel

[1] A fundamental contention of the liberal school of Biblical criticism is that Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were not written by Moses, but that they constitute a compilation of various traditionary narratives made about 900 years after the time of Moses. For an able defense of the Mosaic authorship consult "The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch," William Henry Green (Scribner's).

was Prime Minister of Babylon, the world-empire of his time; Ezekiel was a priest, bred in the atmosphere of ritualistic observances; Amos was a lowly gatherer of sycamore figs. Yet this diverse group produced history, poetry, drama, and narrative, that, for consummate artistry of form and sheer beauty of expression, stand upon the lonely pinnacle of supreme greatness.

Remarkable! A paradox! These are exclamations fully justified. Never was such great literature written under such varied and unfavorable conditions by men so little fitted, most of them, for the exacting work of composition. Yes, this is indeed a paradox. How is one to account for it? There are two explanations. On the one side is the conservative point of view which asserts that writings so aglow with the very presence of God must have been sent by Him to men, must have been divinely inspired. On the other side is the modernist point of view which maintains that much of the Old

Testament was compiled from traditional sources, that some of it is sheer legend, and that even its most sublime portions are the product of human genius alone. The New Testament is regarded as the work of early converts, not chiefly influenced by divine power, chronicling the life of our Lord and the history of the first years of the church. Every man must judge for himself the alternative most reasonable and most consonant with the highest view of God.

Obscurity veils the actual writing of the Bible. We do not know the precise conditions under which God revealed His Word. There is in existence no single original manuscript, either of the Old Testament or of the New Testament. As early as the first century A.D. the originals of the Old Testament appear to have been lost. And the original documents of the New Testament have shared the same fate. When the Bible first assumed its present form, it was made up of Hebrew copies or a Greek translation

of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. But although every original manuscript has apparently perished, there are extant a great many ancient copies of the Bible and parts of the Bible. Old Testament manuscripts are exceedingly numerous; the libraries of certain scholars contain hundreds of copies of the Hebrew Scriptures. Scattered throughout libraries all over the world are about four thousand ancient New Testament manuscripts. Of Jerome's Latin translation we have thousands of old copies.

At first thought it would seem almost certain, in view of the vast number of different copies of the Bible and in view of the fact that all originals have been lost, that the present text must contain countless errors. For scribes are commonly supposed to have made a large number of mistakes. Such errors, as manuscripts continue to be copied and recopied, multiply with amazing rapidity. The text of Chaucer, for example, in

the decades intervening between his life and Caxton's first edition of his works, became greatly corrupted.

Yet the Bible must always be considered a special case. Despite the oft-heard cry that it should be treated precisely as other books, one cannot ignore its unique claims. In the first place, it makes a direct assumption of divine inspiration. Scores of times the prophets proclaim the majestic words, "Thus saith the Lord." Over and over again they cry, "The word of the Lord came unto me." When sorely beset by Satan in the wilderness, the Saviour answered His tempter with three appeals to the Old Testament scriptures. And He is reported to have prefaced each direct quotation with the words, "It is written."[2]

From the very first, men have accepted the assumption of divine inspiration. And, in accepting it, they have been forced, by the

[2] Matthew IV, 1–11; Luke IV, 1–13.

very nature of the case, to treat the Bible as a book apart. To the ancient copyists it was what it always has been to every Christian—the Book of Life. Just as the scholars who made the Authorized Version worked to the limit of their capacity for accuracy and painstaking, so these early scribes sought perfection in the arduous labor of copying the Bible word for word. This Book was the foundation of their faith; upon it were based all their hopes for eternity. They could not help bringing to their task care increased ten-fold. They could not but regard the merest error with the most shocked abhorrence.

II

THE TEXT

THE statement is often made that the Bible is full of mistakes, that in the process of being handed down from age to age parts of its text have become untrustworthy. Such opinions are confidently expressed by detractors from Holy Scripture. Only too often Christians permit these statements to pass unchallenged. Because of their own ignorance of the history of the writings upon which their faith is built, they are unable to rebut an error that admitted would destroy the authority of the Bible.

But what are the facts that guarantee the textual integrity of the Bible? Numerous as they are, a few from them may be selected as suggestive.

The whole literature of antiquity, the great body of writings that men call the

classics, rightly considered rests upon a slender documentary basis. The intervals between the time of the composition of these works and the date of their earliest copies are astonishingly wide. The Greek dramatist Aeschylus probably wrote his plays between 500 and 458 B.C. The earliest manuscript of his works belongs to the eleventh century. For a period of 1,500 years, consequently, there is extant no record of his plays. Approximately the same is true of the historians Thucydides and Herodotus; while for the odist Pindar and the dramatist Euripides the gap is 1,600 years. Of such a greatly important work as the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, we have no copy earlier than one made in the tenth century, and Aristotle lived in the fourth century B.C. With the Latin authors, the interval of silence is necessarily somewhat smaller, for the great writers of Rome lived later than their Greek predecessors. Nevertheless we must pass over 750 years before we find an

extant manuscript of Tacitus; and even then most of the text of this important historian rests upon the authority of a single manuscript. Horace's odes do not survive in any copy made earlier than 900 years after he wrote them; and Catullus comes down to us only through a few manuscripts written 1,450 years after he died.

Such is the precarious basis upon which the texts of the classics rest. In some cases, one or two good copies[1] made a millennium after the death of the author are accepted by scholarship as evidence sufficient to establish the authenticity of the text. For the filling in of gaps and the correcting of miscopyings, conjectural emendation must suffice. Yet that the literature of antiquity is spurious, that the great bulk of it is forgery, no sensible scholar would maintain. It takes the brilliant but erratic mind of the con-

[1] As a matter of fact, some important classical texts are based on even less evidence than this. No single manuscript, for instance, has the entire text of Lucian.

firmed seeker after parodox such as Hardouin to go to such an extremity. And but one Hardouin has arisen to question the authenticity of the classics. If, then, the classical texts are accepted, should the text of the Bible especially be doubted, providing its foundation is at least as sure as that of other ancient literature?

In answer to this question, consider now the Scriptures. While the interval which separates the oldest extant classical manuscripts from the time of their writing averages about 1,000 years, we have complete copies of the New Testament made within 250 years after its actual composition. While the great gaps in the life of the classics are shrouded in darkness, we have the full and convincing history of the Old Testament from before Christ up to the time of our oldest sacred manuscripts. For each bit of classical parchment that came to light during the Renaissance, there are literally scores or more copies of the Word of God.

Almost every old monastery has yielded its share. Next to the works of the Church Fathers, the Scriptures themselves are the most numerous of ancient books. As early as 1780, Benjamin Kennicott, canon of Christ Church, Oxford, performed a tremendous service to Biblical scholarship by collating six hundred Old Testament manuscripts and sixteen manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch; and between 1784–1787 De Rossi published in Italy collations of about eight hundred more. And not only are the ancient copies of the sacred writings more numerous than the secular manuscripts, but they are also older; a large majority of the classical manuscripts come from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among the most ancient of classical manuscripts is one in the Vatican library, a Virgil of the fourth century. Yet the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus of the New Testament belong to the fourth century, while portions

of the Greek translation of the Old Testament date back to the third century.

The inferences to be drawn are plain. If the text of the classics is authentic, that of the Bible must be more certainly authentic. Older copies of it exist. Vastly more copies of it exist. This duplication of manuscripts in particular has been highly valuable to scholarship, for, through affording the opportunity for close comparison of a large number of copies of widely different origin, it has aided greatly in establishing the remarkable accuracy of the present text.

In the continuity of its early history, the Bible stands alone. The centuries of silence which confront the scholar in the case of the classics are no problem for the student of Scripture. As far back as 800 A.D. the number of reliable manuscripts is legion. Much evidence from the writings of the ancient rabbis and learned commentators, the Massoretes, as they were called, throws light upon the earlier period from 800 A.D.

to 100 A.D. We learn from these commentaries, or *Massorah*, that the Old Testament text throughout this time was substantially what it is now. About the end of the first century A.D. a company of the persecuted Massoretes gathered at Jamnia to discuss the question of the canon, that is, what books were to be considered sacred and what ones profane. At this conference the traditional text seems to have been fixed. As for the New Testament, it was, like Virgil's *Æneid*, almost from the years of its composition the subject of discussion and exposition. No other book has such an immense tributary literature as it has. But what of the years before Christ? Here the lineage of the Bible takes on, once more, its unique character. Neither original manuscript nor traditional commentary tell us of the Word of God during this period. Instead the evidence is of another and, in some ways, more convincing class—the translation of the Bible into other tongues. One transla-

tion, the Samaritan version, made by the mixed population led into Samaria by the Assyrians after the subjection of the Ten Tribes, is incomplete, as it includes but the Pentateuch. The other is the Greek version, or Septuagint, as it is called. This is complete. Inasmuch as the Samaritan version dates from the fifth century B.C. and the Greek version from the third century, we are able to trace the Bible very close to the actual time of its writing. Yet of what classical works is this true? Few indeed.

No book in the world has had the reverent, the fastidiously careful treatment that throughout centuries has been given the Bible. It has been copied by scribes who regarded mistakes with superstitious terror. In making it known its translators added to their labor their lives. Throughout the dark ages monks in obscure retreats toiled over its pages. For hundreds of years Jewish scribes labored upon the texts of the law and the prophets; painstakingly they revised,

interpreted, and cleansed the sacred word from error. The ancient Greek copyists recorded the number of verses written. The Hebrew scribes counted not only verses, but also each word and each letter. Distinguishing the central portion of the book copied, they marked the middle letter of the whole work as a keystone, so to speak, on which to base their ideal edifice of perfect copying. If they detected the slightest error, even unto the miswriting of a single letter, it was their duty to destroy at once the page upon which the error appeared. They wrote with a peculiar ink upon sheets made from the skin of a "clean" animal. They spoke aloud each word before writing it; to write even a single word from memory would have been a gross crime. It is said that these scribes prayerfully wiped their pens before writing the name of God, and before writing that most holy word "Jehovah" they washed their whole bodies. After these rules had been observed in the production of a new manu-

script, it was compared with the original; and if only one wrong letter were discovered, the entire copy was rejected. The solemn warning of one rabbi to a scribe has been recorded: "Take heed how thou doest thy work, for thy work is the work of heaven, lest thou drop or add a letter of the manuscript and so become a destroyer of the world!"[2]

The piety which characterized these Hebrew scribes was passed on to the Christian copyists. The very ornaments which beautify the monastic manuscripts, the elaborate initial letters, the splendid coloring of the conventional designs, are all witnesses to the reverence with which the copyists worked. Like their ancient Hebrew prototypes, they were passionately zealous for accuracy. The fact that, in certain cases, five of their manuscripts of a classic author have been considered by the best scholarship sufficient

[2] Cf. Collett, "All About the Bible," p. 15.

evidence for establishing the text of that author proves their reliability. Moreover, as in the case of the Old Testament, the whole body of Scripture had the benefit of frequent revision during the dangerous period of its life—the first six centuries. Origen restored the text of the Septuagint; Jerome, Eusebius, and Augustine, to mention outstanding names, compared existing copies of the Bible. Thus many errors were detected and in consequence serious corruption was obviated.

With memorable devotion the Church fathers pored over both Old and New Testaments. Utilizing a scholarship that is even now, in this day of advanced research, held in veneration, they compared and revised. And then, centuries later during the Renaissance, Melancthon, Luther, and Erasmus, to name some of the greatest scholars of all time, labored over the Word of God. A hundred years later a company of the most learned men that royal command could

muster assembled in England for the making of the Authorized Version. Again, after a lapse of more than two hundred years, English and American scholars met for the revision of the King James Bible; and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the American Revised Version was produced.

But notwithstanding this marshalling of scholarship, a few corruptions have insinuated themselves into the text. The great body of these corruptions, however, are mere scribal errors. Let us look at a typical error of this kind. The fourth verse of the eighth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel states that David took from Hadadezer, king of Zobah, seven hundred horsemen. But in First Chronicles, chapter eighteen, verse four, David is said to have taken seven thousand horsemen from Hadadezer. It is easy, however, to understand how a mistake such as this came to be made; a scribe confounded the two Hebrew letters indicating the numbers and forgot the points over one of them.

Such scribal errors are, on the whole, of little importance. Their bearing upon the integrity of the Bible is negligible. The remarkable thing is not that the scribes made errors, but that they made so few. Especially in the case of the Old Testament, the difficulties under which they worked were colossal. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts were originally written entirely in consonants with the vowels omitted and without spacing. If we were to write English in this way, the result would be well-nigh undecipherable. In spite of these difficulties, however, it has been estimated that the variations of any importance in the text of the Bible amount to far less than one one-thousandth of the whole. One need only compare the accuracy of the sacred text with the accuracy of profane literature to realize that God guided the makers of the Bible. In its preservation throughout ancient times it is, as in its subject matter, unique—a book apart from other books.

III

THE EARLY VERSIONS

The story of the Bible is intricately bound up with the story of its translations; for it is in languages other than those in which it was originally written that it has reached the whole world. Today, for one Hebrew Old Testament or Greek New Testament, there are literally thousands of translations in every tongue and in every dialect known to man.

In this respect no fair comparison can be made between the Scriptures and other ancient writings. Old translations of classic authors are not extant in large numbers. The bulk of those that have come to light are the Latin translations of the Greek classics, inevitably made because of the inter-relation of the two civilizations. But as for Gothic versions of Homer or Coptic translations of

Virgil, one may seek in vain. Yet Ulfilas translated parts of the Bible into Gothic in the fourth century, and among the oldest sacred manuscripts are the Coptic versions. We find the Gospels in Ethiopian and in Anglo-Saxon; we do not find the orations of Cicero, the dramas of Aeschylus, or the odes of Horace in these obscure tongues.

The barbarians fell upon Rome and razed it to the ground. They trampled under foot the literary and artistic treasures of antiquity, extinguishing a great but decadent civilization. And then, ignorant and fierce, they returned to the wilderness whence they came. They cared little for the polished phrases of Ovid or the ready wit of Plautus and Terence. Their thoughts were of war and deeds of violence. Yet, although they sacked Rome, they could not escape all that was in Rome. One book, among a few others, remained with them. Part of it, indeed, through the work of Ulfilas, had been with some of their tribes even before

the fall of Rome. As time went on, this book was translated into many dialects. And within a few centuries the descendents of the very barbarian hordes who had sacked Rome were carrying the torch of civilization. Much later, when the revival of learning came and men began to delve into the intellectual history of their kind, many of the classics were found, hidden away in musty libraries and old, forgotten corners of monasteries. But, during the long centuries that intervened between the fall of Rome in 476 and the Italian Renaissance in the early fourteenth century, the one book that, in conjunction with a few fragments of classic literature such as the works of Aristotle, kept men in touch with the things of the mind and the things of the spirit was the Bible.

The first of the long line of translations, made presumably in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt about 277 B.C. by seventy scholars of Alexandria, derives its

name of *Septuagint* from the Greek word meaning "seventy." It is a translation into Greek of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. Many variant readings of it exist. In its relation to textual criticism and in its influence upon subsequent versions, the Septuagint is of great importance.

The early centuries of the Christian era witnessed the supremacy of the Roman Empire. Latin was the universal language. It was inevitable that the Bible should be put into the common tongue. By the beginning of the second century, there were already many Latin versions of the New Testament, and in the fourth century their number was so great and they differed in so many details that careful revision was demanded. At the request of Pope Damasus, Jerome, one of the greatest of the partistic scholars, undertook this work. Jerome's Old Testament was probably based upon the Hebrew manuscripts; his New Testament was essentially a revision of the Old Latin Testaments. The

Latin Bible thus produced by Jerome was published about 384 A.D. and adopted as authentic by the Church. From the time of Alcuin in the ninth century down to 1592 when Pope Clement VIII ordered the recension which is now the Standard Roman Catholic Version, it has been the subject of continual revision. It has long been known as the Vulgate, a name taken from the Latin word *Vulgata*, which means "commonly used."

IV

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO ENGLAND

SEEMINGLY insignificant occurrences sometimes influence amazingly events apparently unrelated to them in time and in place. Such an occurrence was the birth about the year 540 A.D. of a son to one of the patrician families of Rome. Given the finest social and educational advantages, the boy became a lawyer. At the age of thirty-one he was made praetor of Rome by the Emperor Justin II. His father died. He inherited wealth. Following the admonition that Jesus gave to the rich young ruler, he distributed his money to the poor. Seven monasteries, one in Rome and six in Sicily, were founded through his fortune. He resigned the praetorship, bestowed all of his robes, his gold, and all his precious stones

upon the needy, and devoted himself to the service of God. Only the most humble duties could satisfy his longing to serve; choosing a lowly life rather than exalted position, he refused the headship of a convent.

It was at this time in the life of Gregory —for he is known by this name—that a beautiful incident took place. We today know of it because the Venerable Bede, foremost writer of Anglo-Saxon England, set it down upon parchment in his *Ecclesiastical History*. In one of the slave markets of Rome, Gregory one day saw some golden-haired youths. He was struck with their beauty and intelligence. When he inquired whence they came and who they were, he was told that they were "Angles," and that they had come from a heathen island across the sea. To Gregory these youths seemed fair enough to be called of a truth "Angels"; and he straightway made a resolve to convert their native land to Christianity. Tradition has it that he set out upon this mission

at once, but that the voice of the people called him back to tasks at Rome.

From thence on Gregory's rise was great. At last he became Pope, and as Gregory the Great he will long be remembered as one of the wisest and most just rulers early Christendom ever had. In spite of his high position, he did not forget the golden-haired youths whom he had admired years before. He charged Augustine in 596 to go to England as a missionary, and gave him two copies of the Latin gospels[1] to take with him. The following year Augustine landed on the island of Thanet.[2] King Ethelbert re-

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[1] The Anglo-Saxon translations show that Gregory gave to Augustine the old Latin version of the Gospels (*Vetus Italica*), not the Vulgate.

[2] Augustine was not, however, the first to bring Christianity to the British Isles. Even before the time of St. Patrick (? 389–461) missionaries are said to have visited Ireland. In 563 St. Columba with twelve friends set sail from Ireland in a wicker boat covered with hides. He landed at Iona (I-colum-cille) off the coast of Scotland. After much opposition from the Druids he finally secured this island as a gift from the king. On it he founded the

ceived him and his companions in friendly fashion. And in a short time Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Thus Christianity came to England.

The two little books which Gregory gave to Augustine were of the highest importance. As quickly as the English became Christian, their thirst for the word of God grew. The Gospels were copied over and over again. Soon they were translated into the vigorous speech of the Anglo-Saxons. Who did this work, who first gave the Scriptures to Englishmen in their own tongue, we do not know. We know only that, by the beginning of the eighth century, the translations of the Gospels had penetrated even to the northern Abbey of Wearmouth in Durham where lived the Venerable Bede. That other parts of the Bible were soon brought into England is evident, for in the seventh cen-

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historic monastery that proved so influential in bringing some knowledge of Christianity to the Pictish inhabitants of Scotland.

tury the poet Caedmon put some of the stories from Genesis into Anglo-Saxon verse. Yet it is the Gospels, based upon the Latin texts sent by Gregory to England, that stand first in the long line of version upon version, rendering upon rendering, that has given us our most beautiful and our most precious piece of English literature.

The following paragraph illustrates the primitive language in which the Gospels were made English by these early folk. It is the first seven verses of the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John.

"And he cwæþ to his leorning-cnihtum, Ne sý́ eower heorte gedréfed; . . . ge gelýfaþ on God, and gelýfaþ on me. On mínes fæder húse synd manega eardung-stówa; ne sǽde ic eow, hyt ys lytles wana, đæt ic fare and wylle eow eardung-stówe gegearwian. And gif ic fare, and eow eardung-stówe gegearwige, eft ic cume, and nime eow to me sylfum, đæt ge sýn, đær ic eom. And ge witon, hwyder ic fare, and ge cunnon đone weg. Thomas cwæþ to him, Drihten, we nyton hwyder đú færst,

and hú máge we ðone weg cunnan? Se Hǽlend cwæþ to him, Ic eom weg, and sóþf æstnys, and lif; ne cymþ nán to fæder, búton þurh me. Gif ge cúðon me, wítodlíce ge cúðon mínne fæder; and heonon-forþ ge hyne gecnáwaþ, and ge hine gesáwon."[8]

As additional evidences of the high value which the rude and warlike people of ancient England placed upon the Bible, the metrical adaptations of Aldhelm, the versions prepared at the instance of King Alfred, and the renderings of Aelfric have come down to this day. Well on into the thirteenth century, translations of portions of the Latin Bible were still being made. Orm in the *Ormulum* paraphrased the Gospels and the Acts. William of Shoreham and Richard Rolle put the Psalter into the vernacular. But despite the labors of these scholars, no English translation of the entire Bible was

[8] Quoted from Bosworth and Waring, "The Gospels—Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, Wyclif, and Tyndale Versions

available. Only to those who could read Latin—and these were very few indeed, for none but a little group of churchmen and scholars were really educated—were the complete Scriptures accessible.

V

JOHN WYCLIF'S TRANSLATION

FINALLY the great work, which the translations of Caedmon, Bede, and all the other English scholars who had labored over the Bible from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries but foreshadowed, was accomplished; the whole Word of God was open to all who knew the English tongue. No more were the peasants and burghers to be at the mercy of an ignorant and oftentimes unscrupulous priesthood. Although the actual transformation took centuries, the common people were at last freed from a slavish dependence upon the clergy.

The seed through which this emancipation was chiefly effected lies in the work of John Wyclif. If Jerome is to be honored as the author of the Latin Vulgate, Wyclif deserves equal praise as the man who gave English-

men *their* Vulgate. For he is fully of the stature of Jerome. While his scholarship may not have been so profound as was that of Jerome, it must be remembered that many advantages which the Roman enjoyed were denied him. Certainly his figure looms in a heroic way just as large. Wyclif stands in the vanguard of English reformers. The chief scholar of his time, he defied with dauntless courage all authority that sought to oppress his mind and spirit. Church images, the temporal authority of the pope, the Romish ceremony of the mass, the doctrine of transubstantiation—all these were questioned by the clear, strong analysis of his penetrating mind. Such was his winsome personality and his purity of life that almost the whole University of Oxford from the Chancellor down to the humblest student rallied to his support against the censure of the primate and the crown. When persecuted most bitterly, when the powerful Lancastrian party had deserted him, Wyclif,

with calm courage, said, "I believe that in the end the truth will conquer." Then he sought his most powerful weapon. Tract after tract came from his pen, and as speedily as written was spread broadcast by bands of lowly priests who soon came contemptuously to be known in the vernacular of the time as "Lollards."[1] Crowds of these poor preachers, in coarse clothes and bereft of worldly goods, went up and down the land spreading the heretical doctrines. Soon the whole country was aflame. Half of London was Lollard.

At this juncture, Wyclif set about the work which he was called of God to do. The tracts and controversial writings were of outstanding importance, because they were written not in the Latin of the learned clerks but in the speech of the common people. It was this that gave them their enormous influence. And now Wyclif determined

[1] The probable meaning of this term was "idle babbler"; it was confused with *loller* ("one who is sluggish").

to open the Bible to his countrymen. He realized that his contentions against the ecclesiastical abuses of the time were supported by the Word of God. If he could but put this Book before the people, if he could but free it from its Latin prisonhouse, no opponents, however strong, could prevail against him. All of his arguments resolved themselves into the great premise that the Bible is the sole authority in things pertaining to the church and to the spirit. Accordingly he began the greatest of all his tasks. In the hard work of translation he was assisted by his friend, Nicholas Hereford. The year 1378 saw the appearance of the New Testament in his idiomatic and vigorous English. A few years later his labors resulted in the rendering of the whole Bible in the mother tongue. And finally in 1388, four years after his death, John Purvey, his favorite pupil and his curate at Lutterworth, brought out a corrected and revised edition of his master's work.

The inaccessibility of the originals, combined with Wyclif's slight knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, caused him to translate directly from the Vulgate. Such a procedure was inevitably attended by many errors. Yet these cannot obscure the decisive worth of his achievement. Certainly the fact that his knowledge of Greek and of Hebrew was limited is no indictment of the soundness of his learning. During the middle ages the scholar who knew both of these languages was rare indeed. Just how far Wyclif succeeded is best shown by the complaining remarks of some of his enemies. "Master John Wyclif," said one, "by translating the Bible into English, has laid it more open to the laity than formerly it was to the most learned of the Clergy." Another, speaking with some heat, said, "In this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad and trodden under foot of swine."

As a literary figure Wyclif is not only important, he is commanding. He was the

first great writer of English prose, no mean distinction surely. With Geoffrey Chaucer he will be venerated as one of the parents of English literature. It is a commonplace of our literary history that, as our poetry is said to have been founded by Chaucer, so Wyclif may be called the founder of English prose. His style, especially in the translation of the Bible, is marked by great vigor and terse simplicity. He wrote bluntly in the language of the plain people who were seeking their freedom in such outbreaks as Wat Tyler's Rebellion. Not striving for rhetorical adornment, he nevertheless put on paper phrases of deathless beauty. Occasionally his translation expresses the thought of the original with the finality of perfection. No one, not even a Tyndale, could attempt to improve upon such consummate renderings as "the deep things of God" and "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Indeed some of the most beautiful portions of the King James Version can be

traced directly to John Wyclif's Bible. The following passage from Psalm 46 is a fair specimen of its style:

"Oure God, thou art refuyt, and vertu; helpere in tribulacions, that han founde vs greetly. Therfor we schulen not drede, while the erthe schal be troblid; and the hillis schulen be borun ouer in to the herte of the see. The watris of hem sowneden, and weren troblid; hillis weren troblid togidere in the strengthe of hym. The feersnesse of flood makith glad the citee of God; the hiȝeste God hath halewid his tabernacle. God in the myddis thereof schal not be moued; God schal helpe it eerli in the grey morewtid."[2]

[2] Forshall and Madden's edition of Wyclif's Bible. (Purvey's Revision.)

VI

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE RENAISSANCE

When Wyclif died, the driving force for a Bible which all might read unmolested was gone. One hundred years after his death, England as a nation was still without the Word of God. The man who had taken the first great step, the man who had made the first complete English translation, was needed to carry forward the fight. It was impossible for popular interest in religion to continue at the white heat with which it had burned during his lifetime. Unsympathetic kings and a priesthood desirous of holding the people in ignorance forcibly suppressed general reading of the Bible. To be sure, many copies of Wyclif's translation were cherished in hidden corners and read by the light of the surreptitious candle. But

they were read only on pain of persecution. Circumstances militated against the speedy consummation of Wyclif's reforms. For one thing, there were no printing presses to disseminate his writings. Much as his Bible and his tracts were circulated in manuscript, they could never reach the people as printed books can. Furthermore, the language was in a state of acute change. In 1500 English was a different tongue from what it had been in 1400. Inflectional endings had been sloughed off, new words had been added, even the syntax was different.

Important though it was as one of the causes which gave rise to religious freedom in England, Wyclif's translation was not, therefore, the chief source of the Bible which we read. For the background of this version, we must look rather to the scholarship of the Renaissance.

Certain movements in the history of thought are pivotal. They stand out with monumental distinctness. Lacking under-

standing of them, one cannot hope to view the course of humanity from the right perspective, for they strike their roots deep into all phases of life. Such a movement was the Renaissance, that extraordinary revival of interest in learning, art, and life itself that followed the dark mediaeval years.

The middle ages were fundamentally a time of repression of much that is normal and wholesome in life. Education was for the few, and even for them it was strangled beneath the iron collar of a rigid system of formalistic studies. Authority, and that of the most literal and autocratic kind, reigned supreme over the domain of the intellect. Men's minds were not shrunken; they were merely turned away from earth to look with peculiar intensity toward another world. Therefore, tradition for this period records the absurdity of great minds debating with austere logic the number of angels that could dance on the point of a needle. Learning was confined to the monastery schools and

a few universities, themselves dominated by the church. Unrelated to the concrete problems of life, impatient of beauty in literature and art, mediaeval education was impracticable without the compensation of being devoted to attractive ideals. Of regard for the warm and pulsing life that is in true beauty, there was comparatively little.

The barbarian hordes had submerged Rome and with it much of the intellectual heritage of the past. But the mind of man is too adventurous to remain long enthralled by any outlook on life that stultifies the finer faculties. As early as the first part of the thirteenth century there were indications of the coming revolt. Frederick II[1] of Sicily, for instance, dared to question the hitherto unimpeachable authority of Aristotle, the infallible god of mediaeval thought. In the thirteenth century men began to discover some of the lost classics, hidden away in

[1] 1194–1250.

monasteries. The effect of contact with these masterpieces was immediate. The brilliancy of a Petrarch and a Boccaccio reflects their stimulus. Originally confined to Italy, the new insight into life spread rapidly. Students from far and near flocked to the Italian cities in order to listen to the lectures of such renowned scholars as Manuel Chrysoloras, who was the first to bring from Constantinople to Europe knowledge of the Greek tongue. In such teaching as his, they found the way to a new world of thought and of emotion. Travellers like Chaucer, Tipthorpe, and Linacre came into personal contact with the movement at its fountain head and transferred its inspiration to England. By the middle of the sixteenth century most of Europe was stirred with zeal for the new learning. Realizing that intellectual and aesthetic enjoyment is not in itself sinful, scholars threw themselves into the mastery of the great literature and art bequeathed by antiquity to the world. "For

the first time," says Taine, "men opened their eyes and saw."

This enthusiasm for the things of the higher faculties was of such power that its influence spread to fields other than the literary and the artistic. Epoch-making invention, discovery and exploration broadened the whole conception of man's relation to the world. Copernicus propounded his theory, and thereafter men could not believe with Ptolemy that the earth is the center of the universe; Columbus, Drake, Raleigh, and Magellan discovered new continents; Gutenberg invented printing. Such widening of the horizon of thought and feeling that gradually and inevitably resulted from the Renaissance made itself felt in all phases of life. Especially did it react upon religion. The increasingly broad point of view proved the unwisdom of superstitious concealment of the Scriptures from those whose faith was founded upon them. Through books printed from movable type tremendous impetus was

given to the circulation of translations of the Bible. In 1452 Gutenberg published the Latin Version; the last years of the fifteenth century saw one hundred editions of the Bible in Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch, German, and Bohemian. Even the original Hebrew of the Old Testament was printed in 1488—a boon to the Biblical scholarship of the time.

At about this time[2] was born Desiderius Erasmus. His was the most brilliant mind produced by humanism, that high development of learning that was the very quintessence of the Renaissance; his was the scholarship that laid the foundation for impartial accuracy in the rendering of Scripture. In 1516 he edited the Greek New Testament, making an independent study of the text and adding illuminating comment. His book had a far-reaching influence. At the time of his deepest poverty Erasmus had found

[2] c. 1466.

aid in England. He had been received at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. He had been befriended by men of position and scholarship such as John Colet, Sir Thomas More, and Archbishop Warham. His lectures had been heard with interest and approbation; his writings had been warmly praised. Consequently his Greek Testament was read by the finest minds of the nation. It was a daring work, for Erasmus had labored independently of the traditional Vulgate. His intention was to strip the text of the mass of dogma with which the church had covered it. He hated ignorance and superstition. "I wish," he wrote, "that even the weakest woman might read the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul. . . . I long for the day when the husbandman shall sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, when the weaver shall hum them to the tune of his shuttle, when the traveller shall while away with their stories the weariness of his journey." But, great scholar that

he was, he realized that his dream could never come true so long as Christendom was bound to the traditional Latin renderings. Therefore, a pioneer in the field of New Testament scholarship, he produced his edition of the Greek Testament—a work to which the makers of the Authorized Version as well as their predecessors were profoundly indebted.

VII

WILLIAM TYNDALE AND HIS FOLLOWERS

The time was due for a man, made of the stuff of which martyrs are made and endowed with great literary skill, who could bring to maturity the seed which Wyclif had planted and which the faith of the people coupled with the labors of consecrated scholars had kept alive. This man, for he finally appeared, is the subject of a warning which one Edward Lee, almoner of King Henry VIII and later Archbishop of Canterbury, addressed to his sovereign. "Please it your Highnesse to undrestand," he wrote while in France, "that I ame certainlie enformed, as I passed in this contree that an Englishman, your subject, at the sollicitacion and instance of Luther, with whome he is, hathe translated the Newe Testament in to English, and within fewe dayes entendethe

to arrive with the same emprinted in Englond. I neede not to advertise your Grace what infection and daunger maye ensue heerbie, if it be not withstonded. This is the next way to fulfill your Realme with Lutherians. For all Luthers perverse opinions bee grounded opon bare words of Scriptur not well taken nor undrestonded, whiche your Grace hathe opened in sondrie places of your royall Booke. All our forfadres, governors of the Churche of Englond, hathe with all diligence forbed and exchued publication of Englishe bibles;" the king should continue this tradition; "as God hathe endued your Grace with Christen courauge to sett forthe the standard against thies Philistees and to venquish them. . . . This realme of Fraunce hathe been somewhat tooched with this sect. . . . And yet, blessed be God, your noble Realme is yet unblotted."[1] Such was the attitude of eccle-

[1] J. J. Jusserand, "A Literary History of the English People," Vol. II, p. 204.

siastical authority toward the reading of the Scriptures by the common people, a curious combination of bigotry and flattery of the none-too-righteous monarch.

The man, who, "hathe translated the Newe Testament into English," was William Tyndale. Born about 1490 in a little Gloucestershire village and brought up under church influences, he took Franciscan orders. He was at an early age a close student of the Bible; at twenty-five he is reputed to have translated portions of the New Testament. That his scholarship was influenced by the best phase of the Renaissance is probable. Erasmus visited England for the second time in 1509–1514, and Tyndale may have heard some of his Greek lectures during this period.

At a time when intolerance was prevalent, Tyndale's community was noted for its bigotry. The narrowness and the arrogance which he saw reflected in the local church irritated him greatly. His decided opinions, which he was not at all careful to conceal,

led him into frequent controversies. It is said that he once brought a well-known churchman to overwhelming defeat in theological discussion. Thereupon the churchman cholerically exclaimed, "We were better to be without God's law than the Pope's." This was more than Tyndale could bear; he could not forgo an audacious reply. "I defy the Pope and all of his laws," he said; "and if God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the scriptures than thou dost." In the light of this incident it is easy to see why Tyndale was forced to leave Gloucestershire. A church embroiled in political warfare and vacillating between independence and allegiance to Rome was in no mood to tolerate bold heretics.

Tyndale went to London. There, in 1523, he presented to Bishop Tunstall his plans for putting the Bible into the vernacular. But the Bishop was not responsive. Tyndale approached other prelates, meeting

nothing but rebuff in each case. Finally he realized that he could never accomplish his mission in England; that if his work were to cause the "boy that driveth the plow" to know more of the Scriptures than the clergy, it must be done abroad.

He found refuge in Wittenberg. Here in the heart of Germany, working amid dauntless spirits like himself, he devoted his life to the task which he had resolved to accomplish. The first-fruit of his labor was published at Worms in 1525–1526; it was an English New Testament. The following year, copy after copy of it was smuggled into England. Four years later, in 1530, his translation of the Pentateuch appeared.

But Tyndale never completed his work. Hounded like a common felon, he lived in obscurity, poor yet infinitely rich. It was not long before his enemies found him. Like the Master whom he served, he was betrayed by a faithless disciple. The wretched traitor delivered him to the imperial authorities at

Antwerp. He was condemned for heresy. In 1536 at Vilvorde, near Brussels, he was publicly strangled, and his body was later committed to the flames. His last utterance was, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Tyndale did not perish in vain. At the very moment of his martyrdom, his testaments were being read in every county of England. The Scriptures were accessible even to the ploughboy. All the royal power and all the influence of an intricately organized ecclesiastical system could not prevent England from reading. The people had tasted the water of life; no other fountain could quench their thirst. The church began to sanction good translations. The crown set its seal of authority upon the version of Miles Coverdale, Tyndale's successor and the man who completed his work. Archbishop Cranmer sponsored the version of John Rogers, one of Tyndale's companions, the stout-hearted Rogers who went to the

stake in 1555, a martyr under the persecution of Queen Mary. His Bible, bearing through a publisher's trick the name of Thomas Matthews as translator, appeared in 1537. Through the cleverness of the printers, the royal license and exclusive privileges of publication were obtained, and "Matthew's" Bible thus became the first "authorized" version. In 1539 appeared the "Great" Bible, a ponderous tome, that well deserved its name. It was prepared under the supervision of Thomas Cromwell, and had in subsequent editions the sanction of Archbishop Cranmer. Royal decree caused this book "to be set up upon every Church door." Contemporary writers tell of the joy with which the people received this announcement. At St. Paul's in London six copies were chained for reading to as many desks. Multitudes assembled round these ponderous volumes and listened in hushed silence while one of their number read aloud. Aged folk learned to read so that they could understand

for themselves the things of God. Little boys left their games and flocked to hear the Bible read. So complete was the triumph of the Scriptures that less than two decades after Tyndale had been driven into exile by the persecution of his countrymen, the name of the very Bishop of London who had scorned his plans appeared on the title page of the Great Bible.

During the short reign of Edward VI, publication of the English Bible was encouraged. However, when his Catholic sister, Mary, took the throne, the country was plunged for a few years into a state of intolerance even more bitter than the hatred that had caused Tyndale's exile and martyrdom. Churches by the score reverted to Catholicism. Bibles were everywhere collected and publicly burned in great quantities. Protestant printing presses were seized. Scholars like Rogers perished in the flames. Those who escaped fled abroad as did Coverdale. Despite it all, thousands of the common

people clung to the Bible, keeping their precious books hidden away from the prying eyes of bishops and priests.

Persecution invariably leads to renewed vigor of the hated cause. Amid the horrors of a reign that made the queen infamous by the title "Bloody Mary," another great translation was produced. A number of Puritan and Presbyterian fugitives fled to Geneva in Switzerland. Under the guidance of their great leader, John Calvin, they made, in 1557–1560, their own version of the Scriptures. In the actual work of translation, a certain William Whittingham had a large part. He was assisted by Miles Coverdale and other English scholars. Calvin himself wrote the introduction. The whole assembly of exiles contributed most bountifully, and the version appeared beautifully printed from types of pure silver.

When Elizabeth took the throne after the death of "Bloody Mary," the persecutions ceased. The fugitives returned, bringing

back to England the new Geneva Bible, published, not in bulky volumes suited only to be chained to pulpits, but in small, convenient quartos. Its success was immediate. Everyone began to read it. Soon it was the popular version. The success was merited. Whittingham and his co-workers produced a translation of notable scholarship and beauty. Moreover, they made important innovations that have been followed to this day. The apocrypha, or the extra-canonical books, were for the first time omitted. Marginal readings, excellent albeit Calvinistic, were introduced; and, most important of all, individual chapters were divided into verses. In subsequent editions a helpful Bible dictionary was included. These things did much to make the Geneva Version the most influential of all the translations issued from the time of Tyndale to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Until the publication of the Authorized Version, it had but one rival. This was the Bishops' Bible, a meri-

torious rendering made with the encouragement of the Archbishop of Canterbury and approved by the Church. But it never won the hearts of the people as did the Geneva Bible.

Meanwhile even the Roman Catholics, the erstwhile tormentors of the martyred Tyndale and Rogers, began to realize the value and the necessity of English Bibles. Perhaps they saw the menace to their doctrines which lurked in the ever increasing number of Protestant translations. Perhaps they understood how their communicants were continually tempted to read these translations. At any rate some of their scholars who had been driven to France by the English reforms produced the Douai Version, begun with an annotated New Testament published at Rheims in 1582 by John Fogny and finished by the publication of the Old Testament at Douai in 1609. Translated as it was directly from the Vulgate, it contains many of the peculiarities of the Latin.

In style it must be commended for the dignified sonority with which the words sometimes march along in measured and stately periods. It has its place in the provenance of the Authorized Version, for the Jacobean translators occasionally referred to it. By the Catholic Church it is considered the standard English rendering.

For over thirty years the Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible shared the supremacy throughout England—the former among the common people and the latter in the Church. Then came the consummation of the work of hundreds of years. The Authorized Version appeared. The origin of this outstanding translation embraces centuries, reaching back past the troubled life of Tyndale, the Renaissance when Erasmus labored, the middle ages when Wyclif spoke out so boldly, the time of King Ethelbert when Englishmen lived in tribes, the years when monasteries were the only libraries and hooded monks the only guardians of learning, even past

the days of the Vulgate to the third century before Christ when the Septuagint was made. As Rome was not built in a day, so the Authorized Version was not made in the months in which the group of selected scholars toiled over its pages. It is the glorious summary of a long process of literary evolution—the outcome of patient searching after exact and careful renderings of God's truth.

In the later years of this evolution no group of men exerted a wider influence than William Tyndale and his followers. Coverdale, Rogers, Whittingham, and their colleagues—these men, by adding translation to translation, each one surpassing in some particular its predecessor, laid the firm and massive foundation for the great version that was to crown their efforts. Above them all stands William Tyndale. Great translators are far more rare than great poets, for translation requires a certain combination of literary gifts, a blending of delicate perception of word values with great facility in

alien languages, that is unusual wherever it appears. These gifts Tyndale, undeniable literary artist that he was, possessed. His is the ruling influence on the Authorized Version. The flower of its beauty lies in his renderings. Phrase after phrase of his simple and musical English is reproduced in the Bible which we read to-day. Listen to his translation of Luke II: 8–10:

"And there were in the same region shepherdes, abydinge in the felde and watching their flocke by nyght. And loo! the angell of the Lorde stode harde by them and the brightnes of the Lorde shone rounde about them; and they were soore afrayed. And the angell sayd vnto them, Be not afrayed; beholde! I bringe you tydinges off greate ioye, that shall come to all the people. For vnto you is borne this daye in the cite of David, a saveoure, which is Christ the Lorde."[2]

[2] Bosworth and Waring, "The Gospels—Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, Wyclif, and Tyndale Versions."

Froude, paying high tribute to the King James Bible, justly wrote: "The peculiar genius, if such a word may be permitted, which breathes through it; the mingled tenderness and majesty; the Saxon simplicity, the preternatural grandeur, unequalled, unapproached in the attempted improvements of modern scholars—all are here, and bear the impress of one man, and that man was William Tyndale."

VIII

THE KING JAMES BIBLE

In 1603 James Stuart of Scotland ascended the throne of Great Britain. Characterized by a contemporary monarch, Henry IV of France, as "the wisest fool in Christendom," he was a strange combination of scholar and coxcomb, wise man and egotist. Along with all his absurdities, however, there went not a little shrewdness and a good share of solid learning. To this grotesque ruler the eyes of the nation were turned. The bitter warfare between Protestantism and Catholicism that had torn England for centuries was by no means over. The days of "Bloody Mary" were too recent to be regarded dispassionately. Although popery was in subjection, dangerous plots were rife in certain quarters. Nonconformists, both in Scotland and in England, complicated the

situation. The result, a general feeling of tension in regard to religion, made the attitude of the new king toward the Church a matter of first importance. On the one hand were the Puritans, who, knowing James's early contact with Presbyterianism, hoped that he would look upon them with favor. On the other hand was the Established Church, in a strong position, for, with Stuart obstinacy, James clung to the principle of the divine right of kings, and the Established Church was indissolubly linked with the government.

The issue was not long in doubt. James clearly indicated that he intended to support the Church of England. The Puritans immediately capitalized certain of their grievances. Contending that the Prayer Book was marred by inaccurate renderings and that the order of worship was too elaborate, they began to sow dissension. To settle such matters as this, James assented to the request for a Church Conference.

It was held at Hampton Court. The king, twenty clergymen, including bishops, deans, Puritans, one Scotch Presbyterian preacher, members of the Privy Council, and ecclesiastical lawyers, were present. There was much debate and much controversy, but little of lasting importance was done until Dr. John Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, suggested that a new translation of the Bible be made. This suggestion he based upon the charge, already prevalent, that the existing versions were corrupt. Perhaps the Puritan protest against the Prayer Book first brought this idea to his mind. At any rate, the majority of the conference seemed to be but little impressed. But the king seized upon the proposal. In his usual dogmatic manner he outlined a plan for making it actual. Shortly afterwards the conference broke up, the prelates supporting the king and the Puritans stoutly holding out against his ridiculous claim of infalli-

bility. Apparently little of great moment had been accomplished.

James, however, did not forget the proposed translation. He soon selected the most noted scholars in his realm and informed them of the nature of their task. In 1607 they set to work. The whole company, forty-seven in number, was divided into six groups which met at Westminster, Oxford, and Cambridge—two groups in each place, one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament. Every scholar in each section took the same portion of the text. This he translated. His translation was then compared with that of his colleagues, and upon the basis of the comparison a rendering was agreed upon and sent for approval to a final committee of revisers. These, the ultimate authority, adopted the translation in the form that accorded with their best judgment. In his *Table Talk*, John Selden, the great contemporary jurist and savant, comments thus on the work of

King James's committee: "That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue, and then they met together, and one read the translation, the rest holding in their hand some Bible, either of the learned tongues, or French, Spanish, Italian, etc. If any found fault they spoke; if not, he read on."

In 1611 the work of the scholars was finished; their translation, commonly known as the Authorized Version or the King James Bible, appeared in a large folio. Although it came to the people backed by the Church and the Crown,[1] it was some time before it could supplant the Geneva Bible. But its ultimate success was inevitable. In accuracy and in beauty of diction it surpassed all rivals. This was to be expected, for not only

[1] Notwithstanding the current use of this term, the Jacobean revision was never publicly authorized by parliament or convocation, privy council or king. The acceptance which it has enjoyed has been won chiefly on its merits. "The Cambridge History of English Literature," Vol. IV, p. 26.

did the revisers base their renderings upon the Bishops' Bible, itself a version of high merit, but they also made use of ancient and modern translations in many languages and consulted all the old manuscripts that were available.

Thus the labor of centuries was finished. Whatever can be said in favor of the many subsequent renderings, and there is much to commend some of them, the fact remains that in the King James Bible the Word of God has found its final English form. Admirable as the Revised Versions are, careful and accurate though the scholarship which made them is, they are hardly to be compared with the grandeur of the Authorized Version. As references for disputed passages they are indispensable. But the Bible that Christians read day after day, that they make a part of themselves through their memory, this is the King James Bible. In comparison with the great boon of its marvellous language, certain inaccuracies and obscurities

which it admittedly contains are of little moment. For it is the crown of our literature. No student of English would think of denying it preëminence. Despite differences of creed or of interpretation, literary critics unite in giving primacy to this book, a book that is more than a mere translation in that it recreates for the English-speaking world the very spirit of inspiration in which the originals were written.

And how could it be otherwise? This is the book in the making of which the blood of brave men was shed. They counted the labor of translating worth exile and even death in the flames. This is the book that was burned in public, yet snatched away and cherished in secret. This is the book that was read by a nation, that was taken by fearless men to an unknown land where, on the foundation of the morality inculcated by its teaching, a great republic was built. Through its influence great masters of our literature have been nurtured. Coleridge

owed much to it. Ruskin, describing how his mother read it aloud to him, said, "She established my soul in life, and gave me the most precious, the one essential part of my education." Stevenson, with true faith and fine spiritual discernment, studied it constantly. The very language which is spoken today on the streets and in the homes of America, England, Australia, Canada—wherever English is known—is rooted and grounded in this book. "Clear as crystal," "root of all evil," "still, small voice," "we are the people"—these and hundreds of other Bible phrases are on every tongue. F. W. Faber, writing truly *con amore* of this version, has said, "It lives on the ear like music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells. The felicities often seem to be almost things rather than mere words. It is a part of the national mind and the anchor of national seriousness."

IX

AT THE PINNACLE OF LITERATURE

To give an adequate judgment of the King James Bible is impossible; it presents one of those rare cases where superlatives are not only justified but even positively demanded. Quotations alone are sufficient to demonstrate its matchless beauty of language. In view of all that has been written in its praise, much comment is superfluous.

There are certain passages which, to use the critical method of Matthew Arnold, may be taken as "touchstones" of the literary supremacy of the Authorized Version. The prophecies of Isaiah, for instance, reach a level of sublimity that has never been equalled. No artist in prose, not even Sir Thomas Browne with his stately flow of words, has ever written anything comparable in beauty with these utterances. Consider

the fortieth chapter of the book. Here is a strain of quiet nobilty that bespeaks divine compassion. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Working on a plane far above that of the merely literal rendering, the translators have here caught the very spirit of the God-given original. There is an infinite tenderness in these words, reserved as befits Almighty God, yet exquisitely personal withal. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." This is no elaborate rhetoric, consciously wrought. In their very simplicity the words are inexpressibly lovely. The repetition of "comfort" falls on the ear like a benediction, and makes a cadence always to be remembered for its haunting music. Suddenly there come words alive with joy. The advent of John the Baptist is foretold. "The

voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." And now the prophet, his heart swelling with heavenly joy, mounts a towering peak of sublimity. "O, Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those

that are with young." This is immortal poetry, enduring in beauty because it reflects so truly the inspired original. It is poetry that has lasted for centuries and that is echoed in some of the loveliest songs ever written, several arias from the great Handel's *Messiah.*

For another "touchstone" and one of a different character, let us turn to the New Testament. In the fourteenth chapter[1] of the Gospel of John is the familiar Bequest of Peace, so dear to the hearts of Christians. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that,

[1] Verses 27–31.

when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." It was with these words that the Saviour, prior to the agony of the garden, comforted His bewildered disciples. Out of the compassion of His great heart He spoke with tender intimacy. Although the Cross with its utter darkness and black sorrow loomed before Him, with supreme unselfishness He paused to comfort His disciples, the sheep of His love, perplexed, ignorant, and afraid of the foreboding of the unknown future. In a passage so sacred as this, a single false note, a word wrongly chosen would be an ineffaceable blot. And it is just here that the greatness of the King James Version is shown. There is no artifice, no straining after effect. The words, simple, almost commonplace, carry

with them a noble dignity. As we read, we seem to hear the Saviour quietly speaking to the hushed disciples, telling them not to fear, for He will come again.

Is this translation a miracle of literature? One would almost think so, for the attainment by scholars, no matter how distinguished, of heights of expression never reached by Shakespeare or Milton is certainly without parallel. Yet there are good reasons why the King James Bible stands where it does. No translators ever had before them an original so wonderful as the Bible. Malory put the Arthurian legends into his native language, and produced an English masterpiece—*Morte d'Arthur*. Sir Thomas North translated the Latin of Plutarch and made a superb book more vivid than the original, and furnished Shakespeare with the material for several tragedies. John Florio turned the perfect French of Montaigne into English unique for its individuality. But the Arthurian legends, Plutarch's

Lives, and the *Essays* of Montaigne are not to be compared with any one of hundreds of passages in the Bible. They are simply incapable of inspiring their translators as the Word of God has inspired not only King James's scholars but also all the men who have labored over it throughout the centuries. No secular book has the power of firing the higher faculties that is latent in the Prophets, the Psalms, and practically the whole of the New Testament. The inspirational quality of the Bible itself, then, does much to explain the miracle of the Authorized Version.

If we examine into the condition of the English language at the beginning of the seventeenth century, we shall find another reason for the greatness of the King James Version. In 1611 English had but recently emerged from mediaeval obscurity. After the comparative sterility of the fifteenth century, drama and poetry burst out into the Elizabethan period, that carnival of superb

vigor and passionate beauty. Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe, Greene, Webster, Jonson, a veritable pageant of great writers producing great works, passed by within a few decades. English became the medium of masterpieces. Still fresh and flexible, plastic to new influences and new impressions, it was splendidly fitted for the subtle business of translation. By the very genius of its idiom, it was remarkably adapted for rendering the languages of the Scriptures—Hebrew and Greek.

The English of 1600 was closer to the Anglo-Saxon than the English of today. And Hebrew and Anglo-Saxon, the tongue whose words form the sinews of our speech, have much in common. Both are elemental; both are simple. And both, while capable of vigorous and lyrical utterance,[2] are almost incapable of expressing abstract ideas. The

[2] Cf. "The Cambridge History of English Literature," Vol. IV, p. 37.

Old Testament imagery derives its strength from nature and the primitive emotions. Physical activity is at the root of most Hebrew words. The vocabulary of the ancient Jew was extraordinarily weak where the great modern tongues are strongest, namely in philosophical, scientific, and general terms. And Anglo-Saxon partakes of the same characteristics; it has a real affinity for the Hebrew. The fact that the English of the Elizabethan period was nearer to the Anglo-Saxon than the English of today takes on, therefore, a significance for those who are seeking to explain the literary supremacy of the King James Bible. Thus we find Tyndale saying, "And the propirties of the Hebrue tonge agreth a thousande tymes moare with the English then with the Latyne. The maner of speakynge is in both one, so y^{t} in a thousande places thou neadest not but to translate it in to ye English worde for worde." The same thing, although to a lesser degree, holds true for English and

Greek. "For the Greke tonge," according to Tyndale, "agreth moare with English then with the Latyne."

Great results obtained with economy of means for expression very often mark high and classic art. Bach in his fugues and passion music, Beethoven in his sonatas and symphonies, these men lacked the orchestral resources which lie ready for the modern composer. Yet they gave perfect expression to their elevation of feeling and grandeur of conception. Similarly literature of the first rank is noted for restraint and simplicity of utterance. The Bible shows this quality in its highest development. It is full of condensed narratives that hold in their close compass whole shelves of drama. The parable of the Prodigal Son, for instance, is the pure gold of concise and pointed story telling. And when abstract themes are treated, the same marvellous brevity holds. Thus in a chapter of but thirteen verses, St. Paul has set down the final word on love.

Careful investigation shows that the vocabulary of both testaments of the King James Bible is surprisingly small; not many more than six thousand words are used—less by half than the vocabulary of Milton and about one-third the vocabulary of Shakespeare. And of this number about ninety-three percent, according to the computation of Marsh (made with allowance for repetitions of the same word) are words of native origin. Yet this vocabulary by no means limited the freedom of expression of the Jacobean translators. On the contrary their work is noted for flexibility, accuracy of phrase, and especially for beauty of rhythm. It is a prose remarkably varied yet always noble—at times well-nigh overpowering for the breadth of its sweep, at other times subdued in its companionable simplicity. But whatever be the effect, it is an effect achieved with the utmost economy of detail.

Thus the reader of the Old Testament continually meets majesty of utterance such

as this passage from the end of the prophecy of Habakkuk:[3]

"Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and the moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed. . . ."

In contrast is the lovely melody found in these few verses[4] from the great New Testament prophecy:

"And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in

[3] III, 9–14.
[4] Revelation VII, 14–17.

the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Words like this enter the heart softly and remain to comfort.

Fittingly enough, it is in this last book of the Bible that rhythmical prose reaches perhaps its greatest heights. Witness the entire eighteenth chapter, the lament over the fall of Babylon. It reads like some great epic.

"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. . . . Alas, alas

that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble. . . ."

Subtle cadences that linger to haunt the ear; grief told in imperial rhythms; metals, fabrics, utensils, odors, unguents, food, beasts, "chariots, slaves, and souls of men," —all the opulent pageantry of the orient—these live through the pen of—a certain Galilean peasant called John; nay, rather through the pen of a certain Galilean peasant called John, who was inspired by the most high God. No wonder the translators wrote words of supreme beauty. They were dealing with a divine Book!

X

BEYOND THE POWER OF MAN

THERE is a place where human genius falters. It can go no farther. For man is a finite being. Soar though his spirit may, its pinions inevitably grow weary. The point is reached beyond which he can rise no higher. At such height great spirits feel the steady beat of their wings slacken with fatigue. Death, or, worse than death, decline of their powers, falls upon them. They are cut off—even the Homers, the Dantes, the Miltons—having failed to leave behind them words great enough to rehabilitate the depraved and fire the noble to deeds of godlike beauty.

There comes a time, then, when the spirit of man can rise no higher, when all is expectant for the quickening breath of the Almighty to brush the words of humanity

and make them divine. Such is inspiration. Moses, David, Paul, Luke, John—these men could of themselves never have written a line inspired as God inspires. But the Creator looked kindly upon them. Into their minds and into their hearts He breathed His spirit, and thus He spoke through their pens. It was another creation, this act of inspiration, a creation that has endured throughout centuries. The Word came into existence. While it was yet unfinished, this creative inspiration, the Word became flesh and dwelt among men. A trinity of creations! God, the Father, working through the creation of the universe; the Holy Spirit working through the inspiration of the Word; Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, manifest through the incarnation.

In the canons of literary criticism there stands a doctrine known as the law of universal consent.[1] What men have acclaimed

[1] Cf. Longinus *On the Sublime* (vii. 4).

throughout the ages is, by reason of this universal acclamation, great. True indeed. Yet the Bible demands a special case even of this law. It is the only book that *hosts* of men have not only united in calling great, but have also read daily. Of all the aristocracies, the aristocracy created by literature is the most exclusive. Men who read the classics in such a way that their lives are materially shaped by their reading are more rare than princes and kings. And the Bible, too, creates its aristocracy. Witness the choice band of scholars who in all ages have given their minds to its exposition. Yet, linked with this aristocracy of the Bible, is an even greater democracy. The Bible, supreme among books, is nevertheless read by such numbers of men that it stands as the most widely known piece of literature there is. If the law of universal consent has any force, the Bible is the greatest book in the world.

There are few books with which one can

live day by day even for a month or a year. Continuous association is the final test of art. The picture that can be looked at each day, the music that can be played over and over again, the book that can be read and re-read—these possess preëminence. There is but one book that can survive the test of continuous association throughout a lifetime. When read morning, noon, and night; when turned to in sorrow or in happiness—not for one year or a score of years, but for life—even Virgil palls, Shakespeare's "fine-filed phrase" grows dull, and the sweetness of Keats turns into cloying honey. Livingstone, inspired by the simple words, "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,"[2] opened a continent for Christ and for civilization. Has there been even one man led on to a life of great achievement through the power of a dozen words from any human book? Martyrs have died with

[2] Matthew XXVIII, 20.

the words of the Bible on their lips. Who but delirious actors have died quoting from any other?

In a very real way, then, the Bible is the staff of life. Without this Book, existence would be hideous darkness for the Christian. Destroy this Book, and you have taken away Christ from the Christian. Like Mary at the empty tomb, he can only cry despairingly, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."[3] For the Bible is above everything the Book of Christ. All of its parts fit together like some beautiful mosaic portraying the wonderful story of Jesus and redemption.

As in beauty so in structure the Bible stands apart. One of the attributes of the great writer is the sense of form, the architectonic power. This feeling for structure is what makes Dante so very great. The many cantos of the *Divine Comedy* all

[3] John XX, 13.

belong to a magnificent whole, ever consistent in its elaborate imagery. Because Spenser was deficient in this architectonic power, the *Faerie Queene*, despite the splendor of its verse, is hopelessly obscure as an allegory. John Bunyan, ignorant as the world estimates ignorance, wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, the clearest allegory ever written. He knew but one book—the Bible. From it he learned all he knew. He had architectonic power in the highest sense. Shakespeare, describing the relentlessly subtle villainy of Iago that eats away the peace, the happiness, and the very life of Othello and Desdemona, showed high feeling for structure. The play is as strong as a pyramid.

Now let us imagine a combination of works by Dante, Shakespeare, Bunyan, and scores of others—each one a masterpiece of constructive power. Would it be less than a phenomenon if this combination showed underlying unity of structure greater than that of a single masterpiece of literature?

This is precisely the phenomenon that we have in the Bible. The highly gifted author of Job sings, "For I know that my redeemer liveth."[4] Moses writes over and over again of the Messiah. Isaiah not only tells the manner of the Saviour's unique birth but also describes in detail His sacrificial death. David, much concerned with the Coming Prince, gives of the crucifixion an even more perfect picture than does Isaiah. Daniel, Micah, Malachi utter testimony concerning the Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give us four biographies of the Promised One and reveal Him in four great aspects of His work. Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude carry forward the revelation concerning this One, Whom even the winds and the waves obeyed. And finally John, transported in his Patmos vision, writes his sublime prophecy, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Bible has structure. It is

[4] Job XIX, 25.

bound together by the great theme of Jesus Christ. Subsidiary to this are other themes —sin, death, faith, the Jewish people. These all fit into the great whole. It is a structure amazing in detail, awful in strength. It is like the architecture of some great cathedral. It is indeed a phenomenon, a miracle, call it what you will. Can it be the result of anything but the definite guidance of God?

We come then to this conclusion—the Bible is the Word of God. In no other way can its unique character be explained. In history it is without parallel; in effect upon man, upon the whole course of humanity, it is without compare; in its message it is unique. The final proof, after all, lies within the Book itself. It tells us all we know of God. It tells us of the Christ Who died for us. It tells us how that Christ rose from the dead and how He left with us a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. In it we see God, the omnipotent, the just, the loving Creator, one God,

yet triune in person. In it we see how this God, at the very beginning of history, promised a Redeemer, how throughout the ages the way for this Coming One was prepared, how finally He was born into the world, the Son of a Virgin of lowly estate. The Bible is the only Book that can satisfy utterly the yearnings of our inner natures. It is filled deep with the things of God and contains "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And because it is all of these things, the very cornerstone of our Christian faith, it must be the constant companion of all who would know that faith.

The divine command, "Search[5] the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal

[5] Although the Revised Versions render this an indicative, "Ye search," there is strong authority for the imperative as here quoted from the Authorized Version. Chrysostom, Augustine, Theophylact, Luther, Calvin, Cartwright, Grotius, Jansenius, Leigh, Stier, Alford, and Ryle all favor the imperative. It seems more forcible and more in keeping with the context. The Greek form is identical for the indicative and the imperative.

life: and they are they which testify of me,"[6] cannot be ignored. Common sense demands that the Christian know the Bible. The physician who is ignorant of the *materia medica* is but a tyro. Is the Christian who does not know the Word of God a whit better? Well does the Saviour command[7] to "search" the holy writings. And what, pray, is the connotation of this word "search"? Does it not imply the constant covering of the same ground, the retracing of steps to look for something that has been lost? As a matter of fact, the word in the original,

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[6] John V, 39.

[7] Chrysostom's comment is enlightening: "When Christ referred the Jews to the Scriptures, He sent them not to a mere reading, but to a careful and considerate search. He said not, 'read,' but, 'search.' Since the sayings about Him required great attention (for they had been concealed from the beginning for the advantage of men of that time), He bids them now dig down with care, that they might discern what lay in the depths below. These sayings were not on the surface, nor were they cast forth to open view, but lay like some treasure hidden very deep."

ἐραυνᾶτε,[8] was often used when describing a hound on the scent. The command is wise with the wisdom of divinity. Man has lost eternal life—it must be found. God, through His infinite mercy and tenderness, has provided a way whereby everlasting life may be reclaimed by all men. And God has told of this way in His Book. Only, therefore, through searching the Book, through searching the Scriptures, can the lost be found, can eternal life be regained.

The Bible is no book of cryptic utterance, understandable only for the few great minds of the race. There is a key whereby all may attain to the proper knowledge of its message. The key is expressed in the axiom, Spiritual things are "spiritually discerned."[9] Unless the Bible is read with right discernment, its full meaning can never be grasped. One may study it in Hebrew and in Greek,

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[8] Cf. D. J. Burrell, "The Teachings of Jesus Concerning the Scriptures," p. 137.
[9] I Corinthians II, 14, 15.

one may know every detail of its history, one may appreciate all the beauty and all the sublimity of its phrases, and yet know far less of its central message than the newly converted native from the hill country of India who has learned to spell out in some Hindustani dialect a few verses from the Gospel of John. Here, despite the apparent paradox, is a great truth. The perfect character of God includes perfection in justice, and perfection in justice demands that all human-kind be given an equal chance to know the love of God. The deeps of His compassion must be capable of being sounded by savage and scholar alike. His book would be the most awful failure in history were its great theme of salvation by grace incomprehensible to a single soul. Its very claim to divine inspiration demands that it be universal in the widest sense.

In the perfection of His justice God has met the problem by the simplicity of His Gospel. The spiritual discerning of His

message rests upon but one foundation—faith, faith simple but strong with the tenacity of the trusting child. Belief on the Saviour, faith in His redemptive power, brings regeneration of the spiritual faculties. The Bible becomes a dynamic in the life of the Christian. His steps are guided by it. It is his chief source for strength and comfort. He lives by its precepts.

Sir Francis Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning*, spoke appositely of the contrast between the natural and the spiritual discerning of the Word of God. "It was most aptly said by one of Plato's school," he writes, "that the sense of man carrieth a resemblance with the sun, which, as we see, openeth and revealeth all the terrestrial globe; but then again it obscureth and conceals the stars and celestial globe: so doth the sense discover natural things, but it darkeneth and shutteth up divine."

The intellect alone can never open up the Bible. For the things of God it is hopelessly

inadequate. "It darkeneth and shutteth up divine." Only *that* faith which is the foundation of spiritual discernment can open up the divine. Only *that* faith which believes on Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world, sacrificed for you and for me, can give peace of heart and soul through revealing the true message of the Bible.

THE END

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